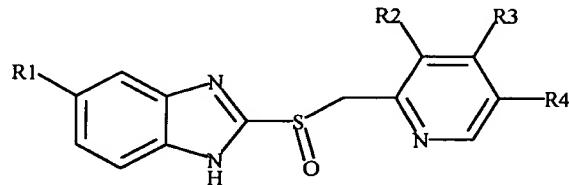


3. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein the inert, non-alkaline coating and the system of modified release are mixed in a single layer.

4. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25, in which said one or more intermediate layers (c) comprise a mixture of one or more layers of inert, non-alkaline coating, and one or more layers of said system of modified release that comprises an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and an inert polymer insoluble in water, and one or more layers of a mixture of inert, non-alkaline coating, and said system of modified release that comprises an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and an inert polymer insoluble in water.

5. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25, wherein the inert, non-alkaline coating, formed of an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients is disposed over the layer (b), wherein the layer (b) comprises the system of modified release that comprises an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and an inert polymer insoluble in water which is disposed over the layer of the inert, non-alkaline coating; and the layer (d) is disposed over the layer formed by the system of modified release comprising an inert non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and an inert polymer insoluble in water.

6. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said acid labile benzimidazole compound is a compound of formula (I)



(I)

wherein

R<sup>1</sup> is hydrogen, methoxy or difluoromethoxy;

R<sup>2</sup> is methyl or methoxy;

R<sup>3</sup> is methoxy, 2,2,2-trifluoromethoxy or 3-methoxypropoxy; and

R<sup>4</sup> is hydrogen or methyl.

7. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said acid labile benzimidazole compound is selected from the group consisting of omeprazole, lansoprazole, pantoprazole and mixtures thereof.

8. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water, present in the layer (b) is selected from hydroxypropylmethylcellulose (HPMC) and hydroxypropylcellulose (HPC).

9. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25, wherein said inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water of the inert, non-alkaline coating, present in the intermediate layer(s) (c) is hydroxypropylmethylcellulose (HPMC).

10. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water of the system of modified release, present in the one or more intermediate layers (c) is hydroxypropylmethylcellulose (HPMC).

11. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said inert polymer insoluble in water of the system of modified release, present in the one or more intermediate layers (c) is ethylcellulose or a copolymer of ammonium methacrylate.

12. (Amended) A pellet according to claim 25 wherein said external layer (d) comprises a gastro-resistant polymer, a plasticizer and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients.

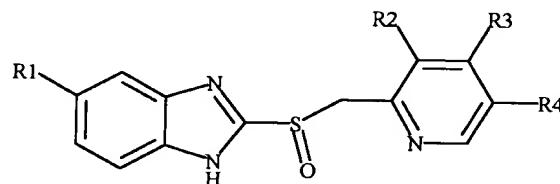
13. (Amended) A method for obtaining a gastro-resistant pellet of modified release that contains as an active ingredient an acid labile benzimidazole compound, that comprises:

(i) applying an aqueous suspension of an acid labile benzimidazole

compound, an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water, and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients to cover an inert nucleus;

- (ii) applying one or more intermediate layers, separated or mixed among themselves that contain (i) an inert, non-alkaline coating, formed of an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients; and (ii) a system of modified release that comprises an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and an inert polymer insoluble in water, a plasticizer and an anti-tack agent, separated or mixed; and
- (iii) covering said intermediate layer or layers with an aqueous suspension that comprises a gastro-resistant polymer, a plasticizer and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients to create an external layer of enteric coating.

14. (Amended) A method according to claim 13 wherein said acid labile benzimidazole compound is a compound of formula (I)



(I)

wherein

R<sup>1</sup> is hydrogen, methoxy or difluoromethoxy;

R<sup>2</sup> is methyl or methoxy;

R<sup>3</sup> is methoxy, 2,2,2-trifluoroethoxy or 3-methoxypropoxy; and

R<sup>4</sup> is hydrogen or methyl.

15. (Amended) A method according to claim 13 wherein said acid labile benzimidazole compound is selected from the group consisting of omeprazole, lansoprazole,

pantoprazole and mixtures thereof.

19. (Amended) A method according to claim 13 wherein said inert polymer insoluble in water, comprised in the system of modified release, present in the suspension applied in step (ii) is ethylcellulose or a copolymer of ammonium methacrylate.

20. (Amended) A composition of modified release that comprises one or more pellets of claim 25.

21. (Amended) A composition according to claim 20, wherein the one or more pellets have the same release profile of the benzimidazole.

22. (Amended) A composition according to claim 20, wherein the one or more pellets have a different release profile of the benzimidazole.

23. (Amended) A composition according to claim 20, further comprising a mixture of (I) pellets with a quick release profile and (ii) pellets with a slow release profile in a ratio between 10:90 and 90:10.

Please add the following new claim:

--25. (New) A pellet comprising an acid benzimidazole compound, wherein the pellet comprises:

- (a) an inert nucleus;
- (b) a layer disposed over said inert nucleus (a), comprising an acid labile benzimidazole compound, an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients;
- (c) one or more intermediate layers that comprise:
  - (i) an inert, non-alkaline coating, formed of an inert, non-alkaline polymer soluble in water and one or more pharmaceutically acceptable inert excipients; and
  - (ii) a system of modified release that comprises an inert, non-alkaline